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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: POLITICAL FALLOUT FROM SARSENBAIULY
MURDER

REF: ALMATY 887 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) Summary: The murder of Altynbek Sarsenbaiuly continues to cause political shockwaves in Kazakhstan. Allegations by the opposition of First Family involvement and charges of high-level cover-up (reftel) have prompted first daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva to go on the offensive by accusing former KNB head Dutbayev of involvement and calling for Senate Speaker Nurtay Abykayev's resignation. Nazarbayeva's husband, First Deputy Foreign Minister Rakhat Aliyev, has been the focus of much public speculation. Meanwhile, the opposition continues its united front in calling on the government to conduct a transparent and complete investigation. End summary.

Dariga Lashes Out

12. (SBU) Most political leaders from President Nazarbayev on down are remaining silent as the investigation progresses. In a move that has surprised observers of the Kazakhstani political scene, however, first daughter, Asar party leader, and Mazhilis member Dariga Nazarbayeva has come out swinging in the press to defend her husband Rakhat Aliyev. In a March 10 article in the "Karavan" newspaper (controlled by Aliyev), Dariga wrote that "something is wrong in our country" when a person can be killed by the security forces in broad daylight. She also cast doubt on the official conclusion that former Nazarbayev insider turned oppositionist Nurkadilov had committed suicide, thereby implicitly criticizing her father. Dariga claimed that former KNB head Dutbayev had immediately told President Nazarbayev that either Rakhat Aliyev, Timur Kulibayev, or presidential nephew Kairat Satybaldiy were behind Sarsenbaiuly's murder. She alleged that Dutbayev was in league with the opposition to destabilize the political situation by framing Nazarbayev's relatives. Dariga also called on Abykayev to resign. She compared recent events to the situation in November 2001 (when the President forced the departure of her husband for Vienna after fierce political infighting), claiming this was a "second attempt to stop the development of society and to stop political reforms."

13. (SBU) In a March 17 Karavan interview, Dariga called for the investigation into the murders to be conducted in a transparent manner. She said that transparency was the only guarantee that the truth would come out, putting an end to political speculation. Dariga also commented that it was a shame that the Anglo-American jury model had been rejected. She called for the Sarsenbaiuly murder court hearings to be open to the press and public in order to allay distrust in the judicial system. (Note: After extended debate,

Kazakhstan has just adopted the "continental model" for its jury system. Jurors will determine guilt or innocence together with the participation of the judge, rather than separately as in the Anglo-American system. End note.)

Harsh Rhetoric at Rally in Memory of Sarsenbailuly

14. (SBU) "For a Just Kazakhstan" (FJK) organized a rally in Almaty on March 18 to commemorate the 40-day anniversary (important in Muslim belief) of Sarsenbailuly's death. Banners at the rally and remarks by the speakers listed several purported "victims of political terror," including Sarsenbailuly; his associates Baurzhan Bekbosyn and Anatoliy Zhurablyov; Zamanbek Nurkadilov; Oksana Nikitina, the slain 14-year old daughter of an FJK activist; and journalist Askhat Sharipzhanov, who was hit by a car and killed in July 2004 after interviewing Sarsenbailuly, and Nurkadilov.

15. (SBU) The rally gathered all the leaders of the opposition movement except Bulat Abilov, still serving his sentence for participation in the February 26 Sarsenbailuly memorial gathering, and Alikhan Baymenov (not a member of FJK). FJK leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbay was the first speaker. He accused the authorities of using fierce methods to oppress the opposition and smother freedom of speech, dismissed the possibility that Utembayev was responsible, and called for a complete investigation. "It doesn't matter to us who is responsible," said Tuyakbay, "be it someone from the parliament, the government, or the president's family. They must be brought to justice." Zhakiyanov spoke next, and was greeted with extended applause. (After the ceremony he had to struggle through a large crowd of admirers wanting to

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shake his hand, kiss his cheek, or get his autograph.) Zhakiyanov criticized Nazarbayev for not speaking out and for not allowing Parliament to examine the issue, and called on the president to explain himself to the people. He said that Nurkadilov and Sarsenbailuly had both paid the ultimate price for speaking out, and called on the public "not just to talk and to think, but to act and to demand that the guilty be brought to justice."

16. (SBU) Other speakers included Sarsenbailuly's brother Rysbek Sarsenbayev, Irina Sovostina of the "Pokoleniye" pensioners' movement, Oraz Zhandosov (True Ak Zhol and FJK), Asylbek Kozhakhmetov (Alga), Tulen Tokhtasynov (Communist Party), Petr Svoik (FJK), Tulegen Zhukeyev (True Ak Zhol and FJK), and Amirzhan Kosanov (FJK and the former RNPK). They all echoed Tuyakbay's and Zhakiyanov's calls for a complete investigation, demanded that Nazarbayev answer the public's many questions about the murder, referred to the European Parliament's March 16 resolution on the murders, and spoke of the need to work toward freedom and democracy in order to honor Sarsenbailuly's memory.

17. (SBU) Zhandosov told the crowd that he had been part of the February 2003 delegation to Moscow when Utembayev had missed a meeting at the Kremlin. He reported that the following morning, Nazarbayev had surmised that Utembayev had gone "back to his bad habits," i.e. drinking. Zhandosov denied that the incident had had any impact on Utembayev's career, as he had remained at the Presidential Administration until his boss Abykayev was replaced by Imangali Tasmagambetov and transferred to the Senate. As is usually the case, Kozhakhmetov's remarks were the most provocative; he claimed that Nazarbayev had fired Dutbayev for daring to implicate members of the First Family in the murder. He also asked why the police had not yet interrogated Aliyev.

18. (SBU) The rally took place behind the Saryarka movie theater on the western outskirts of Almaty. Organizers had asked to hold the event at the centrally-located Academy of Sciences, but the akimat instead issued the permit for the

more remote location. POEC chief and POL FSN estimated the crowd at about 2,000. Organizers claim that 5000-6000 people attended. Police were present in large numbers but did not appear to discourage participation or disrupt the proceedings. Riot police were also present but remained in their buses. (Note: It is politically significant that Almaty akim Tasmagambetov, an influential political figure with his own aspirations to higher office, allowed the rally to take place unimpeded. End note.)

Comment

19. (SBU) Comment: The upheaval caused by Sarsenbaiuly's murder has pushed elite political infighting into the bright light of day. Contacts in the opposition describe Dariga Nazarbayeva as 'unnerved' at the moment as the result of the public scrutiny and accusations. Her unprecedented press statements indicate a sense of desperation, raising the question of whether President Nazarbayev is for the time being not taking sides among the various camps. Meanwhile, the opposition movement has a new sense of purpose and energy, and increasing public visibility. Whereas most observers expected For a Just Kazakhstan to fade away after the elections, its staff and press operation have cranked back up to call not only for justice for Altynbek Sarsenbaiuly, but also for real political reform. One has to wonder if the mastermind of the murder could have foreseen all the results. End comment.
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